

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 46

SEPTEMBER 11th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,—

Before the adjournment of the House of Commons a debate took place on the internment of aliens. I quoted last week the statement by Major Cazalet in the debate that he would not feel happy as an Englishman till this page of our history had been cleaned up and rewritten. Why does it need to be rewritten?

First, because a wrong has been done to a large number of persons, friendly to us and to our cause, many of whom had already undergone cruel suffering.

Secondly, because what we do in this matter has a vital bearing both on success in waging the war and on the future of the world after the war.

## THE POLICY OF INTERNMENT

There is, of course, a case for the internment policy of the Government. It was well stated in the debate by the Home Secretary, who finely represents the best traditions of British administration. Among the aliens, even in the C class of those against whom nothing adverse is known, there might conceivably be some deliberately introduced by the enemy to serve his purposes; there must be more who, having relations, friends and interests in Germany might be subject to pressure: and more still who might be defeatist at heart, and liable to exercise a weakening influence on others. Moreover, there was the danger that in times of excitement popular feeling might be aroused against foreigners and mobs might take matters into their own hands. There ought to be no risk that at a critical moment the attention of the authorities and police should be diverted to the protection of aliens against hostile crowds.

The Government had obviously a real problem to deal with. But the fact that it had to be dealt with at short notice on a large scale and without adequate preparation, and was carried out by officials some of whom had little understanding of the real nature of the problem, resulted in many injustices and much unintended cruelty.

When the war came there were about 68,000 aliens of German and Austrian origin in this country. These were grouped by special tribunals into three classes A, B, C. Class A were interned a few weeks after the war began, Class B in May, most of the men in Class C in June. The class C internees, numbering about 20,000, were all people who were judged by the tribunals after investigation to have nothing against them and to be friendly to this country. (The policy of the tribunals varied and many were placed in Class B without sufficient reason; the Government has recognised this by making those in Class B equally eligible for release with those in Class C, unless their assignment to Class B was confirmed after review by a Regional Advisory Committee.) Nearly all the refugees had left Germany because of their hostility to the Nazi regime or because they had suffered cruelly at its hands. They included many persons of outstanding ability and high distinction in their various professions.

They were taken into custody with no time to arrange for their affairs and allowed to take with them a minimum of luggage. Treatment was in many instances considerate, but in many other cases they were treated as though they were enemy prisoners. The fact that they were officially treated as prisoners of war and given cards for correspondence



with this heading was keenly felt. Victims of Nazi inhumanity were put in the company of aggressive Nazis. Families were broken up, husbands and wives separated. Letters were delayed, in some cases for weeks, and for this period no news could be obtained of other members of the family. As was inevitable when large numbers had to be provided for at short notice, conditions in many of the camps were deplorable and in some cases injurious to health. Medical provision was at first inadequate. These hardships were suffered by persons who are innocent of any crime or wrong-doing and who wholeheartedly desire the overthrow of the Nazi regime.

The effect of all this on opinion in neutral countries has been in the highest degree unfortunate. A protest was sent to the Press by nine London correspondents of leading newspapers in four neutral countries in Europe. They stated that it had been their aim in their journalistic work to give a favourable picture of Britain's spiritual and moral strength, but that the damaging impression created by the spirit and methods of the refugee internments had led millions of sympathisers with Britain's cause to begin to doubt whether British ideals of humanity and justice still prevail.

The importance of this protest can hardly be over-estimated. If we are not standing for ideals of humanity and justice which our enemies have repudiated, what grounds are there for expecting world opinion to rally to our cause? One of the stirring passages in the Prime Minister's speech on August 20th was his assertion that the fact that the British Empire stands invincible "will kindle again the spark of hope in the hearts of hundreds of millions of down-trodden or despairing men and women throughout Europe and far beyond its bounds." That is the great justification for unrelenting resistance to Nazi inhumanity. But we shall persuade the world that that is what we mean not by our professions but by our deeds. The effect of our internment policy has been not to kindle, but to damp down, the spark of hope in many of our actual and potential friends.

It is significant of the basal difference between this country and the totalitarian systems that public opinion, expressing itself, as it was free to do, in the Press, Parliament, and the efforts of a multitude of private individuals, set to work to expose and repair the injustice. The Home Office responded sympathetically. Steps have already been taken to remedy the worst mistakes. A White Paper (Cmd. 6223, 1d.) has been issued defining a number of categories of persons eligible for release from internment, and it is promised that other categories may be added. A substantial improvement has been brought about in the conditions in the camps, though much remains still to be done. It should be added that there is widespread testimony to the excellent and unsparing work of the military officers in the camps.

The modified Government policy widens at both ends the age limits at which exemption from internment is allowed, and provides for the release of the infirm, those who can render in various ways services required by the national cause, persons of academic distinction and those who by their public writings and activities have taken a prominent part in opposing the Nazi system. But what of the plain man who does not come within any of these categories, but who is innocent of any wrong and wholly friendly to this country? The claims of humanity and justice require that his case also should receive consideration as well as that of those whose achievements are more distinguished or more prominent. I know one or two internees for whom I am quite prepared to go bail with my life or goods, and there must be many others for whom reputable British citizens would do the same. Why should not these cases be investigated by tribunals and release granted where the evidence is satisfactory?

#### WHAT CAN WE DO?

Many of you have asked the question, What can we do? Here are some important things to be done.

(1) Seize every opportunity of educating public opinion. The readers of the News-Letter could, if they chose, do a great deal to create a sane and informed public opinion



on a matter vital to our cause. Use every chance to challenge wrong and ill-informed ideas about aliens. Educate people through the pulpit. Keep a watchful eye on the provincial and local Press and take prompt steps to counter any rising anti-alien sentiment. Among the points to be got home are the following:—

(a) Aliens, of German as well as other nationality, are not necessarily "enemy aliens." Many are friendly aliens. It is a silly way to wage war to attack our friends and allies.

(b) We shall not achieve a world based on justice, fair-dealing and good-will unless we act on these principles now.

(c) Any aliens who are left at liberty, or set at liberty, by the Government are people whose cases have undergone the most thorough and searching investigation. Their integrity and loyalty are, therefore, more fully guaranteed than those of most people.

(d) We must resist every temptation to give way to panic. If we do it in one direction, we shall do it in others and slide down the slippery slope leading to moral collapse. The Ministry of Home Security has told us that if we want to win the war we must take some risk and, particularly if we are engaged in production, not spend all our time in air-raid shelters. It is surely worth while to run some trifling risk, which with careful inquiry can be rendered almost negligible, for the sake of our reputation for humanity and justice, which is at the same time an important military asset.

(2) Find out whether there are alien refugees in your neighbourhood and learn at first hand what has happened to them and what their needs are. There are bound to be many such among those released from internment. Many will need help in finding work. Here are practical opportunities of laying the foundations of international understanding and good-will. A better international order will not be brought about by wishing for it or proclaiming its desirability; it can only be created by acts, and these acts include not only public acts but a multitude of individual acts, forging links of understanding and friendship between persons.

## A WAR OF NATIONS OR A WAR OF IDEAS?

More and more people (though as yet still a small minority) are coming to see that this war differs from wars in the more recent past in being less a war between rival nations than between contradictory conceptions of life. This has already been urged in the News-Letter (C.N.-L. No. 40). It is essential to grasp it, since the war cannot be fought successfully with obsolete ideas any more than with obsolete weapons. Hitlerism is a greater revolutionary force in the life of the world than most of us have yet realised.

He is reported to have said to Dr. Rauschning that the conception of the nation has become meaningless. The reason why Hitler's weapon of the Fifth Column has been so successful is that the *idea* of National Socialism worked as a disintegrating influence, and so became a military weapon of the highest importance. Fifth Columnism could be made to appear not a betrayal of one's country but a form of patriotism working for the triumph of ideas that were in its interest.

This lesson needs to be laid deeply to heart, if we are to win the war. Hitler has to be fought with his own weapons. And in the use of this weapon, which has powerfully helped him, we have the advantage, if we choose to use it and know how to do so. Hitler's power is peculiarly vulnerable to the forces of disintegration, since among the Germans themselves there are millions who in their hearts are opposed to the Nazi system and in the conquered territories the mass of the population detest the invader.

We have to train ourselves to think of the war in these terms. But we must not swing from one extreme to the other. The nation is a tougher proposition than Hitler recognises, if the remark attributed to him is correctly reported. His earlier instinct, which appealed to the bonds forged by a common country, speech, tradition and history, was nearer the truth. It is because these influences are so powerful, both consciously and unconsciously, that we cannot treat nationality as a negligible factor. More specific proof is re-



quired from an alien of loyalty to the country of his residence than from its own citizens by birth. But it is equally true that our cause may have whole-hearted supporters and allies among persons of all nationalities, including those of German birth.

When we substitute allegiance to an idea for allegiance to a nation we are dealing with something much more intangible. There are objective tests whether a man belongs to a particular nation; but how are we to know whether a man is genuinely attached to an idea, and whether the idea of which he professes allegiance is really the same as our own? The strength of the National-Socialist idea is that it has behind it in fact the mass of the German people. And what unites our people in opposition to it is not a set of rational ideas but attachment to a way of life which they have experienced, to liberties they have known and valued, to habits and customs that have become part of themselves. Abstract ideas that have not been solidified in habit, and built into practice and clothed in the flesh and blood of actual experience are anæmic and powerless; and those who think otherwise will suffer speedy disillusionment.

These reflections are prompted by a book which has just been published entitled 100,000,000 *Allies—If We Choose* (Gollancz, 2s. 6d.). It says with great pungency a number of true things on the issues raised in this letter. These need saying to rouse us from our complacency. But when we seek a positive answer to the problem we find ourselves left in the lurch. It is simply not true that all those who are opposed to Nazism are united in regard to what they want to put in its place. The majority of people in this country and many of the occupied countries know that there is a European tradition, derived in large part from Christianity, and repudiated by the totalitarian powers, which embodies values that they wish to retain. But they know also that these values found very imperfect expression in the pre-war society and are profoundly dissatisfied with the existing state of things. What the new and better order ought to be they have very little idea. When these questions are clearly faced, it is plain that those opposed to Nazism are not united in their aims. Between an order of society that might be called Christian and the purely secular society based on a materialistic view of life and the pride of human self-sufficiency, which some of the opponents of Nazism aim at creating; even if the latter is anti-totalitarian, democratic and humanitarian, there lies an unbridgable gulf. There lies our problem and our task.

### THE YOUTH MOVEMENT

Before the adjournment of the House of Commons the President of the Board of Education announced the setting up of a new directorate to promote physical training and recreation among young people of both sexes. It will work in close association with the youth branch of the Board of Education and in co-operation with the War Office. There is no more vital question for the country in relation to both its immediate and its permanent needs than the welfare of its youth. It is doubtful, however, whether the new move is conceived on sufficiently large and imaginative lines. I will deal with this subject more fully next week.

Yours sincerely,

*D. H. Deane*

**Subscriptions.**—The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. (\$3. in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. (\$1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. 6d. for three months.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.